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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2008

In Today's Papers

Military Leaders Call for Respect for Secularism, Unity
All papers report on the incoming Turkish General Staff Chief General Basbug's speech during his induction ceremony yesterday. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet's headline reads "Tough Messages from General Basbug" and reports "Basbug wanted the authorities to seriously consider the public's concerns regarding the overwhelming influence of religion in today's society." Mainstream Milliyet reports, "General Basbug warned that religious communities were getting stronger and stronger each day." Basbug said "a section of our society is concerned about secularism and this concern should be taken into serious consideration. This is an obligation for social tranquility within the scope of pluralist democracy understanding. The nation-state should be preserved and everyone should remain loyal to the Constitutional definition of secularism. General Basbug commented on the ongoing U.S. and Turkish military cooperation by saying, "Our cooperation with the U.S. military is perfect. It is one of our most important duties to preserve this cooperation since Turkey-US relations have gained importance."

Caucasus-related Diplomatic Traffic in Turkey
Mainstream Sabah reports that Foreign Minister Babacan will meet with Georgian FM Tkeselasvili on August 31st and with Russian FM Lavrov on September 2nd in Istanbul. Azerbaijani FM Memmedyarov will have meetings with Minister Babacan in Ankara today. During these meetings, Turkey is expected to convey its discomfort with Russia's recognition Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Minister Babacan recently talked with the foreign ministers of the U.S., the UK, Germany and France over the phone and stressed the concerns regarding Russia's attitudes.

Russia/Caucasus

Turkish media outlets illustrate Russia's show of force yesterday as efforts to step up the rhetoric game. Mainstream Vatan carries the headline, "Here is the New Eastern Block," as "Russia forms a bloc of Asian giants" which include, "India, China, Kazakhstan, and potentially Iran." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak carries the front-page headline, "Russia Makes a Show of Force" as "Russia's 45 ton Topal missile makes its debut at a ceremony in front of the

Kremlin." Mainstream Aksam carries the headline, "Russia Challenges the West with an Inter-Continental Missile." In a related article, Yeni Safak also notes, "The EU says Sanctions Are Coming," while Russia responds, "You are sickening!" Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "The EU is preparing sanctions against Russia," while Russian Prime Minister Putin "accuses the U.S. of provoking the war in order to influence the presidential elections." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet carries the headline, "The EU's is the 'Power with a Sick Imagination.'" Liberal Radikal carries the headline, "Putin says Bush Attacked for McCain," in a reference to Putin's interview with CNN last night.

Papers also note Russia did not get the support it wanted from the Shanghai Union yesterday. Leftist Taraf carries the headline, "Russia Doesn't Get Its Wish," from the Shanghai meeting because, "Heads of State at the Shanghai Organization Summit call for respect for every country's territorial integrity and no use of force in local clashes." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "The Shanghai Union decides to not to fully back Russia." Islamist-oriented Zaman carries the headline, "Russia Could Get What It Wanted from Shanghai," as "the declaration does not criticize Georgia," and "China did not recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence due to the implications their recognition could impact efforts for Tibetan independence." Mainstream Milliyet reports "The EU will hold an emergency meeting on Monday to debate sanctions against Russia," but notes, "France, Germany, Italy, and Spain are all dependent on Russia for energy." Mainstream Hurriyet's headline reads, "No Support from the Shanghai Summit for Russia." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak calls the support "measured."

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Editorial Opinion on Current Developments in the Caucasus
Ibrahim Karagul wrote in Islamist leaning Yeni Safak: "The Black Sea region is experiencing its most serious crisis in the last 20 years. Russia is not backing down, while NATO is having difficulty shaping a unified strategy against Russia. In this context, Turkey's role is more important than ever before. Ankara has the capacity to mediate between Russia and the United States to lower the tension. The Georgian Foreign Minister will come to Istanbul on Sunday and the Russian Foreign Minister will come to Istanbul on Monday. Both visits can be a starting point for efforts to prevent a further conflict."

Muharrem Sarikaya wrote in mainstream Sabah : "Current events in the Caucasus have left Turkey trapped between Georgia and Russia. During the speeches at this week's military hand-over ceremonies, I realized that Turkey has expected tensions to reach to this point. Now, the question is whether the situation in the Black Sea will calm down by autumn. According to high level government officials, diplomatic circles and academics, the US and NATO will not violate the Montreux Convention. Russia trusts Turkey. The solution for this crisis lies with Turkey's impartial approach."

Sami Kohen observed in mainstream Milliyet: "Turkish Cypriot Leader Talat is empowered by the Western world's recognition of Kosovo's independence and now the Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Maybe these developments will force the Greek side to act more realistically in talks with the Turkish side. Or, if no solution is reached after the negotiations, just like they recognized their favorite countries, it will push the Western countries and Greeks to recognize northern Cyprus' independence as well."

Cengiz Aktar wrote in mainstream Vatan: "The interim period after the Cold War is almost over and now a new "lukewarm war" is starting. The US is fully involved in their upcoming elections and Western Europe relies on Russia for energy. Now, Russia is speaking a very dangerous language of its own. In this atmosphere, Turkey should determine its own policies. Will Turkey be like Russia and believe peace can be established only by war? Or will Turkey be like the EU and believe in resolving the issues in diplomatic ways?"

Cyprus/Talat in Ankara

All papers report the visit of Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali

Talat and highlight his meeting with President Gul. Coverage draws a parallel between the Cyprus situation and the Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Islamist-oriented Zaman carries the headline, "Developments in the Caucasus Could Affect Cyprus," as Turkish Cypriot Leader Mehmet Ali Talat visited President Gul yesterday and told journalists during a press conference, "We are watching developments in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Kosovo, and East Timor." Sami Kohen of mainstream Milliyet says "Talat's hand is strengthened," as developments in the Caucasus "will likely force the Greek side to be more realistic." Milliyet also notes, "President Gul called attention to the similarities between South Ossetia and Cyprus."

During a joint press conference with President Gul, Talat answered a question in this context by saying "I think the Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia will have an impact on the Cyprus issue, but I can't make a prediction in which direction that would be." President Gul also responded, "However, the Cyprus issue is not a result of the Cold War era. There is an ongoing UN negotiation process, and I think everybody will realize the legitimate rights of Turkish Cypriots as the talks progress." Mehmet Ali Talat's visit came before the proximity talks with Greek Cypriots scheduled for September 3. He met with President Gul, PM Erdogan and FM Babacan, papers noted.

Turkey/Armenia

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Liberal daily Radikal carried a follow up interview with President Gul regarding Turkish relations with Armenia. President Gul expressed a positive tone about Sargsyan's remarks on Turkish-Armenian relations and added: "We are all living in the same region, and we want to solve problems with our neighbors. Turks and Armenians have lived for many years on this soil." Regarding the re-establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries, President Gul expressed support for regional peace efforts and emphasized the importance of mutual dialogue. "We believe that the frozen crises in the Caucasus, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh, should be dealt with through dialogue and courage in order to have a peaceful impact on the region and bring stability." However, Gul indicated no decision had been made on whether he will attend the September 6th soccer match in Armenia.

Radikal also asked political party figures whether President Gul should accept the invitation. Parliamentarians from opposition CHP and MHP emphasized that the solution to the Karabakh issue should remain Turkey's priority. Ruling AKP's Deputy Group Chairman Bozdag refused to comment, "It's not suitable for me to comment on this issue, it is up to President Gul to decide." Mainly pro-Kurdish DTP Co-Chairman Emine Ayna expressed support for dialogue and said "If the President goes to Yerevan, it will be a very positive step."

Editorial Opinion on Turkey-Armenia

Hakki Devrim wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "Armenian President Sargsyan's recent statement about relations between Turkey and Armenia deserves appreciation for its distinguished quality. Turkey has to take advantage of this very important quality at the highest level and President Gul must accept the invitation to go to Yerevan for the soccer match. I am literally tired of Turkey's usual attitude of deferring important problems into the future instead of dealing with them directly."

Editorial Opinion on Turkish Human Rights and Democracy Debates

Ertugrul Ozkok wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "When I heard about the beating of a shop owner in Ankara's Kecioren Municipality, I kept waiting for a statement from the Municipality and/or from the Interior Ministry. However no statement of any kind came from the officials. The actual security camera footage verifies the horrifying nature of the incident. It looks like a group of mafia figures brutally beat a shop owner in the nation's capital to punish him for selling alcohol. Even the American Embassy felt uneasy about this, while Turkish leaders, including the Interior Ministry and other government officials, preferred to turn a blind eye. The mentality that limits democratization to the headscarf issue and the Ergenekon case makes Turkey's accession to the EU a far-fetched dream."

Barack Obama/US Elections

Mainstream Hurriyet carries the front page headline, "Martin Luther King's Dream Comes True" and all papers pay particular attention to Barack Obama's unique contribution to American politics as the first African-American presidential candidate. Mainstream Milliyet carries the headline, "Obama Makes History." Mainstream Hurriyet reports, "A former soldier who fought in Iraq and lost her legs came to the convention to support Obama," as "A Black Man Writes History." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says, "Obama is ready for the Presidency." Far right Ortadogu carries the headline, "There Is No Stopping Obama," as "for the first time in a U.S. presidential election, a black candidate will compete."

TV News:

CNN Turk

Domestic News

Ferda Paksut, the wife of Constitutional Court vice-president Osman Paksut, was interrogated as part of the Ergenekon investigation.

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15 people were injured during clashes with municipality security forces in Bakirkoy.

A group of PKK terrorists opened fire on a civilian truck in Semdinli, killing the truck driver and injuring two soldiers and three village guards.

International News

Georgia's parliament approves a resolution calling on the government to cut diplomatic ties with Russia.

The National Convention of the Democratic Party in Denver nominates Barack Obama as its candidate for the November elections.

NATO hands over responsibility in Kabul to Afghan troops.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel tops Forbes magazine's list of the world's 100 most powerful women for the third year running.

WILSON